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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes a peer observation program implemented among American and Japanese teachers in the English Department of Hiroshima College of Foreign Languages, a two-year vocational college in Hiroshima, Japan. Each participant functioned as both an observer and observee, while pre- and post-observation meetings were held between the observer and observee. Both then completed a questionnaire about the peer observation process. The project met the anticipated goals of making teachers aware of the need and usefulness of peer observation, that positive things were happening in the classroom, and that they could rely on other teachers for support, encouragement, and feedback. The pilot study demonstrated that peer observations were worth implementing because: (1) teachers gained valuable insights into aspects of their teaching; (2) observers learned from their colleagues' teaching; (3) teachers worked together instead of in isolation; (4) teachers became more involved in preparing for class; (5) students were more attentive in class; and (6) the results from peer observations helped teachers decide how to improve their teaching effectiveness. (MDM)

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ED 368 178

PEER OBSERVATION: A PILOT STUDY

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October 1992

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ABSTRACT

Peer observation among teachers has been increasing in popularity over the past few years. It can help improve teacher effectiveness as well as promote cooperation among the participants. This paper describes such a program conducted in the English Department of a vocational college in Japan. After a brief background on Japanese education and the school where this pilot study was carried out, an initial supervision stage is described.

The different steps leading up to the observation, the observation itself, and the procedures are contrasted with a similar project conducted at another school.

Finally, this paper ends with guidelines and advice for the reader who is considering organizing such a project.

Teacher Behavior
Teacher Education
Teacher Effectiveness
Teacher Improvement
Teacher Supervision
Teaching Experience
Teaching Skills
Teaching Styles

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INTRODUCTION

After completing the course work at the School for International Training (SIT) for the Summer Master of Teaching (SMAT) program, I resumed teaching at the Hiroshima College of Foreign Languages (HCFL) in Japan where I'd been teaching for two years already. I wanted to help the school, its staff, and students to improve, especially in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

At first, I had considered helping revise the curriculum. Although this was certainly an area that needed attention at HCFL, I discovered that there were more immediate needs. The inexperienced teachers on the staff lacked training and support. They wanted help, but they had nowhere to turn. There was also very little communication between the teachers. This was evidenced by the lack of continuity in the courses. Teachers often remarked that it was difficult to plan their syllabi without knowing what was going on in the other classes. The students couldn't see any relationship between the different courses they were taking, because the teachers were working independently.

In order to best address these needs, I reflected on what had helped me most during my studies at SIT. Although many aspects of that program helped me, the one that stood out was the Interim Year Project (IYP) when a supervisor spent one week observing me in the classroom. The support I received at that time prompted me to make many positive changes in my teaching and gave me confidence in my ability to solve my own problems.

Thus, I decided that the first step in helping my colleagues at HCFL was to get their permission to enter their classrooms and observe them.

At the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) conference held in Omiya, Japan in November, 1990, I attended a presentation by Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart entitled *Teacher Development Through Peer Observation*. Their project involved the teachers of the English Department at City Polytechnic of Hong Kong by pairing up to observe each other in the classroom. Each teacher chose a specific teaching aspect they wanted their partner to observe. Richards and Lockhart emphasized that the observer's role was not to supervise but merely to collect data which would help their colleague improve their teaching. The detailed description of Richards and Lockhart's project encouraged me to organize a similar undertaking at HCFL.

This paper will focus on my initial supervising of colleagues and the peer observation pilot study I organized. I will discuss the design and rationale of this study in Chapter 2, and the results in Chapter 3. In Chapter 1, I will provide some relevant background.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

In the first part of this chapter, I would like to give information about Japanese culture, the educational system and how HCFL fits into this larger context. In the second part, I will describe the initial supervisions I conducted prior to organizing the pilot study for peer observation.

The Educational Context

The Japanese educational system shares some common traits with its American and European counterparts. Most Americans, for instance, would readily recognize the similarities in the school structure: elementary school (grades 1-6); middle school (grades 7-9); and high school (grades 10-12). Europeans, especially the French, would notice the parallels between the baccalauréat and the Japanese university entrance exams. These exams have been the subject of much controversy and cannot be ignored by high school teachers in Japan, especially those involved in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

Without getting into details and statistics, one could say that once a student passes the entrance examination of a prestigious university, that student is practically assured of graduating and landing a lucrative job with one of the top Japanese companies or with the government. The pressure is such that some parents go so far as enrolling their child in the "right"

kindergarten, which will allow this student to get into the "right" elementary school, which continues up to high school. These elite schools don't necessarily offer a better education, but they possess excellent track records in getting their students to eventually pass the university entrance examinations. Many parents also enroll their children in "cram" schools which hold special classes in the evenings and on weekends.

If a student doesn't pass an entrance exam, and most attempt several in one year (usually one or two at top universities and at least one at a less demanding private college), there are a number of different options available to them. One is to try again the following year. This means another year of "cram" schools possibly supplemented by a part-time job if the parents have depleted their education budget. Apparently not many choose this route, presumably because they are either exhausted or discouraged, or both. They are unwilling to be older than their classmates, and eventually their coworkers. Furthermore, these ronin, or "master-less samurai," are reluctant to let friends and family know that they will take these exams again. Failing a second time is very embarrassing.

A second possibility is to start working. This is especially true for girls in large families where it is considered more important for the boys to get a higher education. Girls may be given only one chance to pass the entrance exam; failure, for many, bringing their school days to an end. Of course, not everybody attempts to pass the entrance exams. Most vocational high school students start working immediately after graduation.

Another choice is for students to do nothing. Most parents start saving early enough and acquire sufficient funds for their children's education. With money available and no university to go to, most students feel the need

for a transition period between intense studying and the grueling life of a company worker. Some use this available time and money for traveling abroad.

Finally, a fourth option for students are two-year colleges. Some of these schools are similar to American junior colleges in that they offer a more or less general education with a chance to specialize or major in a specific field. There are also senmon gakko, which literally means "specialty schools," but are best described as vocational schools. Students go to these schools to get specific job skills, such as accounting, mathematics, use of the abacus and computers. In these schools, emphasis is placed on passing the different levels of achievement tests, which carry much more weight than grade point averages with hiring directors. Often students attending these vocational schools are tired of studying and/or have a low self-esteem. For many, this time is their last chance to take it easy; so, some don't work as hard as they could.

The Hiroshima College of Foreign Languages is a two-year vocational school that specializes in English, offering two study programs. The General English Program offers courses to enhance students' job skills, such as typing, word processing, bookkeeping, secretary sciences, Japanese calligraphy, training in the social graces (how to bow properly, how to exchange business cards, etc.), interview techniques, and so on. The Study Abroad Program offers students courses which will help them prepare for entrance to (mostly American) colleges, for example TOEFL, U.S. History, World History, English as a Second Language (ESL) and French.

In their first semester (April to September), students also take basic English courses such as conversation, composition, reading, and language lab

(listening and pronunciation). At the end of this first semester, students choose a "major": travel/hotel, interpreting, translating, international business, and conversation (general catch-all category for those who have no particular goals). Beginning with the second semester (October-March), students at HCFL continue some basic English, job skill courses, and add specific courses related to their "majors."

Many positive changes have taken place at HCFL over the past several years. Prior to 1988, it was known as Enjoyable Learning of English (ELE), a language school of about thirty full-time students. When I arrived in 1987, the daily schedule was based upon various in-house texts. For example, the first period would be *Just For Beginners—Pink* (Isted, 1984), and the second period would be *Just For Beginners—Yellow* (Isted, 1984).

Now texts are chosen from major publishers and classes are divided by skills. Many other changes were necessary to transform a language school of thirty full-time students taught by five full-time teachers into a senmon gakko of four hundred full-time students and twenty-five full-time teachers.

Of the twenty-five full-time teachers at HCFL in 1991-1992, ten were non-Japanese nationals. Most of them were hired in Los Angeles or San Francisco when the school principal, Jun Kumamoto, took students on a study tour of the U.S.A. Recently, more and more teachers have been hired in Hiroshima; some are teachers from local language schools, others are sightseers who decide to extend their visit to Japan by becoming English teachers. Many of these teachers stay for the duration of their two-year contract, although a few have had to leave earlier.

During my four-and-a-half-year stay at HCFL, about 70% of the foreign staff had no teaching experience. Their training consisted of sitting in on a

few classes before starting to teach. The school did not attempt to supervise or evaluate its teachers (Japanese or foreign).

Supervision

In order to launch my observation project, I discussed my intentions with my colleagues and set up a schedule for classroom observations. In this way, teachers knew in advance why and when I would be visiting their class. I also scheduled in a free period after the observation so that I could talk to the teacher whom I observed. Because of the complexity of scheduling, these observations took place over a period of six weeks. I also provided a copy of the schedule to all teachers involved so everybody knew what I was doing. Since many teachers used their free periods for preparation, correction, lunch, etc., I proposed to spend fifteen to twenty minutes for the post-observation interviews.

This new role of supervisor was quite a revealing one. The different perspective of sitting in the back of the classroom allowed me to see many things that I was unaware of as a teacher. For instance, while observing a composition class, the teacher, just as I usually did, circulated among the students while they were writing. It dawned on me that, because of the arrangement of the desks in the room, some students were receiving more assistance than others. The students who were seated farthest from the aisles got very little attention because it was physically more difficult for the teacher to lean over and look at their work. Not only did I help the teacher I was observing, but I also made a mental note for myself. This is when I started to realize that it would also benefit my colleagues to take turns observing and being observed.

The post-observation interview took place immediately after the class. I decided to conduct it just as my practicum supervisor in the Masters degree program had done with me.[1] To begin with, I gave a form to the teachers to fill out. They were to do some reflective writing by listing three things they thought went well and why, three things that didn't go well and why, and three things they would do differently the next time. After five to ten minutes, I asked the teachers to read what they had written. I listened and restated some things in my own words to check my understanding of what each teacher was trying to say. I resisted the temptation to give my opinion on what I thought they ought to do. Instead, I listened and clarified what they were saying by either asking a question or by re-phrasing.

By my clarifying what they were saying, the initial reaction of the observed teacher was that I was the one telling them what went well and what didn't, and what changes could be made. However, it slowly occurred to them that they were the ones who had made these observations. "The focus was hence on critical awareness raising in order to improve one's own self-understanding of one's own teaching practice." (Richards, 1990)

Although I received positive feedback and felt that I had successfully introduced my colleagues to reflective teaching, I realized that more needed to be done. Many of the teachers I had observed wanted more help with specific aspects of their teaching. As a result of this initial supervisory phase, I was determined to continue, but knew I had to make some changes. This is when I learned of Richards and Lockhart's peer observation project. I found some of the changes I was thinking of in their project, as well as other helpful

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[1] As part of the Interim Year Project (IYP) at SIT, a supervisor observed my classes for one week.

suggestions. I decided to transform supervisions into a peer observation project.

CHAPTER 2

DESIGN AND RATIONALE OF THE PILOT STUDY

In this chapter, I will begin by listing my objectives for the pilot study. This will be followed by some background, consisting of the circumstances and guidelines to Richards and Lockhart's peer observation project. Finally, I will describe the design of the pilot study itself.

Objectives

After the initial experience with supervising (Chapter 1, pages 7-9), I decided to organize a peer observation project which would involve as many teachers at HCFL as were interested. There were many reasons why I decided to take this next step. First of all, the perspective of an observer had shown me that watching others teach clarified aspects of my own teaching approaches. Thus, my first objective was to get my colleagues involved as observers as well as observed teachers.

Secondly, since many teachers at HCFL usually talked about the negative aspects of their classrooms among themselves in the office, I also hoped that peer observation would make them aware that many positive things were happening in their colleagues' classrooms. This would not only generate a more positive attitude about the school and the students, but it also would enable them to share useful techniques.

Third, since many of the teachers at HCFL were inexperienced and had received no training, another objective was to provide them with support and

encouragement. This could better be attained by having their peers (whom they perceived as equals), not administrators or supervisors (perceived as evaluators), sit in on their classes.

Finally, I aimed to continue fostering the reflective process which I had asked teachers to engage in during the initial supervision stage. This I hoped would inspire them to investigate more closely what they were doing instead of always attributing blame to their students and/or the school's policies whenever something went wrong.

All of these objectives were part of one overall goal—to encourage teachers to approach their job as a profession. In other words, I wanted them to take pride in their work and develop a desire for self-improvement in their teaching. I realized that all of this would not happen immediately but would take time.

Background

In Richards and Lockhart's peer observation project (Richards and Lockhart, 1990) at City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, the participants were staff members of the English Department who taught English for Academic Purposes (EAP). These were experienced teachers, both native and non-native speakers of English, all with graduate TESL degrees.

Richards and Lockhart's project was initiated following a general discussion of the value of peer observation within the department. It was suggested that staff might like to take part in peer observation on a voluntary basis. Participating staff were first asked to choose a colleague to work with. About a third of the staff agreed to take part.

An orientation meeting was then arranged during which the goals of the project were discussed and procedures for implementing peer observation agreed on. The following guidelines were developed:

1. Each participant would both observe and be observed. Teachers would work in pairs and take turns observing each others' classes.

2. Pre-observation orientation session. Prior to each observation, the two teachers would meet to discuss the nature of the class to be observed, the kind of material being taught, the teacher's approach to teaching, the kinds of students in the class, typical patterns of interaction and class participation, and any problems that might be expected. The teacher being observed would also assign the observer a goal for the observation and a task to accomplish. The task would involve collecting information about some aspect of the lesson, but would not include any evaluation of the lesson. Observation procedures or instruments to be used would be agreed upon during this session and a schedule for the observations arranged.

3. The observation. The observer would then visit their partner's class and complete the observation using the procedures that both partners had agreed on.

4. Post-observation. The two teachers would meet as soon as possible after the lesson. The observer would report on the information that had been collected and discuss it with the teacher. (Richards and Lockhart, 1990)

Finally, in order to determine the usefulness of peer observation, Richards and Lockhart asked the participants to complete a questionnaire about the observation experience. A separate questionnaire was used for the teacher and for the observer. The questionnaires elicited information on the procedures that were used, the kind of information that was collected, and on how useful the information was to the teacher being observed. (Richards and Lockhart, 1990)

Design

The project completed by Richards and Lockhart was well organized and seemed simple enough. My intention was to mirror it, following it step by step. Initially, I couldn't find in it anything I disagreed with or, at least, there didn't appear to be anything that would have to be changed. Slowly, however, as I planned each stage, I realized that the differences in schools and staff required me to re-think my position.

Following Richards and Lockhart's lead, I made this project voluntary. They, however, had the advantage of having a staff with extensive experience and a working environment which was conducive to bringing everyone together for regularly scheduled meetings. Their first step of holding a general discussion of the value of peer observation could not be successfully duplicated at HCFL for two reasons. First, I felt that the time demand I would be placing on my peers for the actual observations was going to be as much as they would be willing to volunteer. Calling meetings prior to the project itself may have scared many away, considering that most of them on a regular basis snub the meetings called by the administration. Secondly, since many of my colleagues had little teaching experience, much less any supervising experience, I didn't think there would have been much of a discussion. I also feared that some of the more experienced teachers would have dominated such a discussion and possibly pressured the less experienced ones into not volunteering for the pilot study.

For these reasons, I combined Richards and Lockhart's general discussion of the value of peer observation and orientation meeting into a one-on-one interview with each teacher. During the interview, I (1) briefly explained the project, (2) asked the teachers if they were interested in

volunteering, (3) asked if there was a particular teaching aspect they wished to have investigated, (4) asked if they had any preferences as to who would be their partner, and, (5) asked if there were any particular time periods and classes that were more (or less) convenient.

Besides the advantages cited above, these interviews allowed me to make sure that each teacher understood what the project entailed. It also gave the teachers the opportunity to privately oppose any pairing with a colleague they didn't feel comfortable working with. The one big disadvantage was that it took a lot of time to organize it in such a way.

Except for this change of combining the general discussion and the orientation into one-on-one interviews, I decided to keep everything else the way Richards and Lockhart had done in their project. The steps were as follows:

1. One-on-one interviews. (as described above)
2. A pre-observation session. (as described in step two of Richards and Lockhart's guidelines)
3. The observation. (as described in step three of Richards and Lockhart's guidelines)
4. A post-observation session. (as described in step four of Richards and Lockhart's guidelines)
5. Questionnaires. These are the same ones Richards and Lockhart developed for their project—see figures 6-7.

The most difficult part in designing this pilot study was to collect various observation procedures, or instruments, from which the teachers would choose. During the one-on-one interviews with the teachers, I got some feedback as to which teaching aspect they were interested in having observed. But most of them didn't have anything specific in mind. I decided therefore on the following criteria in choosing the observation instruments:

1. Variety of teaching behaviors to be recorded.
2. Easy to understand.
3. Used everyday English words.
4. Easy for observer to fill out.

In order not to overwhelm the teachers with a myriad of choices, I settled on five observation instruments (figures 1-5). In addition to these, I also suggested that teachers could either use an ethnography, or a detailed narrative of what goes on and what is said by teachers and students in a classroom (which does not require a form), or they could devise their own forms.

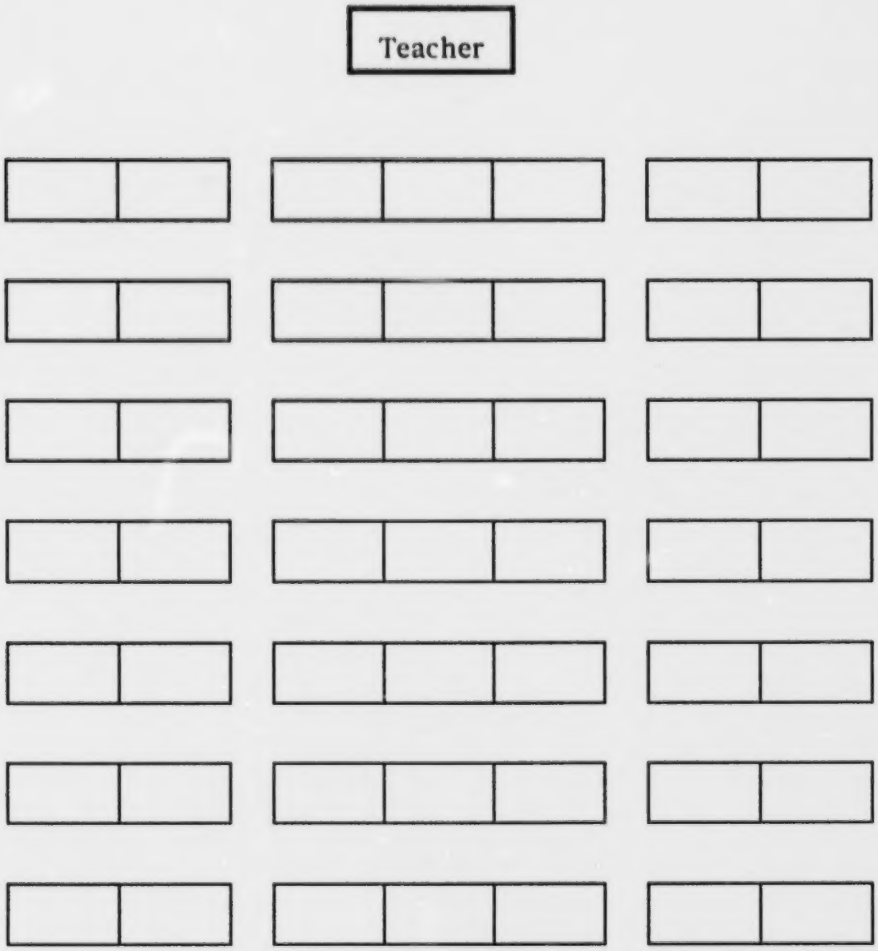

Figure 1 CLASSROOM SEATING CHART

POSSIBLE USES:

Simple tally: record which student the teacher calls on to determine if there's any teacher bias.
Verbal interaction: record (with arrows ←↓→↑) who is talking to whom.
Response time: with a stopwatch, record how long the teacher gives each student to answer a question or perform a task.

Figure 2 CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT OBSERVATION SCHEDULE
(Nunan 1989, p. 109)

1. All instructions were clear.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
2. The class understood what was wanted at all times.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
3. Every student was involved at some point.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
4. Students were interested in the lesson.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
5. The teacher made sure all students understood.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
6. Materials and learning activities were appropriate.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
7. Class atmosphere was positive.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
8. The pacing of the lesson was appropriate.	yes/not sure/no
9. There was enough variety in the lesson.	yes/not sure/no
10. There was the right amount of teacher talk.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
11. Error correction and feedback were appropriate.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
12. There was genuine communication.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
13. Teacher was skilled at organizing group work.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no
14. Explanation of points of language was clear.	yes/not sure/no yes/not sure/no

Note: The first set of "yes/not sure/no" is for the first half of the class; the second for the second half. Those with only one set are for the entire time observed.

Figure 3 TEACHER'S RESPONSES TO STUDENTS' QUESTIONS
(Good and Brophy 1987, cited in Nunan 1989, p. 151)

USE: When a student asks the teacher a reasonable question during a discussion or question-answer period.

PURPOSE: To see if the teacher models commitment to learning and concern for the students' interests.

Code each category that applies to the teacher's response to a reasonable student question. Do not code if the student wasn't really asking a question or if he was baiting the teacher. Put the following letter codes next to the students' number.

BEHAVIOR CATEGORIES	CODES
A. Compliments the question ("Good question")	1 ___ 26 ___
B. Criticizes the question (unjustly) as irrelevant.	2 ___ 27 ___
C. Ignores the question, or brushes it aside quickly without answering it.	3 ___ 28 ___
D. Answers the question or redirects it to the class.	4 ___ 29 ___
E. If no one can answer, teacher arranges to get the answer himself or assigns a student to do so.	5 ___ 30 ___
F. If no one can answer, teacher leaves it unanswered and moves on.	6 ___ 31 ___
G. Other (specify).	7 ___ 32 ___
	8 ___ 33 ___
	9 ___ 34 ___
	10 ___ 35 ___
	11 ___ 36 ___
	12 ___ 37 ___
NOTES:	13 ___ 38 ___
	14 ___ 39 ___
	15 ___ 40 ___
	16 ___ 41 ___
	17 ___ 42 ___
	18 ___ 43 ___
	19 ___ 44 ___
	20 ___ 45 ___
	21 ___ 46 ___
	22 ___ 47 ___
	23 ___ 48 ___
	24 ___ 49 ___
	25 ___ 50 ___

Figure 4 LEARNING TASKS OBSERVATION SCHEDULE
(Nunan 1989, p. 110)

1. How well do you think the tasks provided by you measured up to the following criteria for "good" language-learning tasks? (VW= very well, W= well, NW= not well)

		After 20	40 minutes
(a)	They encouraged attention to authentic data.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(b)	They addressed the real-world needs of learners.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(c)	They allowed for flexible approaches to doing the tasks.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(d)	They allowed for different solutions depending on different learner skills.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(e)	They asked for input from learners.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(f)	They involved interaction in solving the tasks.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(g)	They encouraged learners to evaluate the tasks.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(h)	They challenged but did not threaten the learners.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(i)	They offered opportunities to talk about language use.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(j)	They helped learners to discover new learning problems and solve them.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(k)	They promoted information sharing.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(l)	They encouraged learners to reflect critically about languages and learning.	VW W NW	VW W NW
(m)	They offered a high return for effort put in.	VW W NW	VW W NW

2. Which tasks or aspects of tasks do you think learners would carry out in real life?

3. Which tasks or aspects of tasks in the lesson do you think learners would only carry out in the language classroom?

Figure 5 INDIVIDUAL PRAISE OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

(Good and Brophy 1987, p. 165, cited in Richards and Nunan, 1990, p. 58)

USE: Whenever the teacher praises an individual student.
PURPOSE: To see what behaviors the teacher reinforces through praise, and to see how the teacher's praise is distributed among the students.

Whenever the teacher praises an individual student, code the student's number and each category of teacher behavior that applies (consecutively).

BEHAVIOR CATEGORIES	STUDENT NUMBER	CODES
A. Perseverance or effort, worked long or hard.	_____	1. ___
	_____	2. ___
	_____	3. ___
B. Progress (relative to the past) toward achievement.	_____	4. ___
	_____	5. ___
	_____	6. ___
C. Success (right answer, high score), achievement.	_____	7. ___
	_____	8. ___
	_____	9. ___
D. Good thinking, good suggestion, good guess or nice try.	_____	10. ___
	_____	11. ___
	_____	12. ___
E. Imagination, creativity, originality.	_____	13. ___
	_____	14. ___
	_____	15. ___
F. Neatness, careful work.	_____	16. ___
	_____	17. ___
G. Good or compliant behavior, follows rules, pays attention.	_____	18. ___
	_____	19. ___
	_____	20. ___
H. Thoughtfulness, courtesy, offering to share.	_____	21. ___
	_____	22. ___
	_____	23. ___
I. Other (specify).	_____	24. ___
	_____	25. ___

NOTES:

Figure 6 PEER OBSERVATION QUESTIONNAIRE (TEACHER)
(Richards and Lockhart 1991, p. 13)

1. During the present peer observation program, did you feel comfortable teaching the class while being observed? Please comment.

2. Do you think there were any changes in the dynamics of the class as a result of an observer being present? Please describe the types of changes that occurred.

3. What did you ask your partner to check during the observation?

4. Why was this aspect selected?

5. On reflection, if you could have this observation done over again, would you have asked the observer to look for something different? Why/Why not?

6. On reflection, if you could have this observation done over again, would you have changed the method of gathering/recording the required information? Why/Why not?

7. How useful was the information collected? Please comment.

8. What was the most valuable piece of information recorded?

9. How useful do you think it would be to do these types of observations more regularly? Please comment.

Figure 7 PEER OBSERVATION QUESTIONNAIRE (OBSERVER)
(Richards and Lockhart 1991, p. 13)

1. What kind of class did you observe?

2. Please describe how you collected the information during the observation. (If you used an observation schedule, please describe it.)

3. Approximately how much time was spent on: a) the pre-observation discussion? b) the observation? c) the post-observation discussion?

4. How much time elapsed between the observation and the post-observation discussion?

5. Was it easy to gather the required information? Please comment.

6. On reflection, if you could have done this observation over again, would you have changed the method of gathering/recording the required information? Why/Why not?

7. How could the observation experience be improved or changed?

8. How useful do you think it would be to do these types of observations more regularly? Please comment.

Observations started in December of 1991. I began by comparing everybody's schedule to see who would be available to observe whom. To simplify things and to allow the teacher and observer to have as much time as possible before the observed class, I decided not to include those classes taught outside the main building. I also decided to have the American teachers observe other American teachers and to schedule the few Japanese teachers whose English was good enough to understand my guidelines to observe one another. I did this to avoid any complications due to cultural differences.

With schedules in hand, I went to each teacher in private and explained the pilot study. In doing so, I stressed the following four points:

1. There was no obligation to take part; it was strictly on a volunteer basis.
2. Results would be kept confidential; I would not use names in this paper.
3. The observer's role was only to observe, not criticize.
4. The teacher would decide what the observer would do.

Of the ten American teachers on the staff, I approached seven, all of whom agreed to take part. Once each one understood what the pilot study was about, I asked if there was anyone they would not want to be paired up with—there were no objections. Next, I recorded their preferences as to which class they wanted to be observed in and which of their free periods would be best for them to be the observer. After compiling all of this information, I made up a schedule of times and classes for each teacher and observer.

The three Japanese teachers of English were also approached in the same manner as the American staff. Two of the three volunteered after some hesitation. The third teacher confided that being observed by an equal (all three Japanese teachers were new teachers at HCFL and of about the same age)

would be uncomfortable. This teacher did, however, agree to be observed by me, since I was senior in terms of age and length of service at the school.

The week before the observations were to take place, I gave each volunteer a packet of information to reinforce what I had said during the one-on-one interviews and to take the place of the orientation meeting. Table 1 shows the cover letter that headed this package; it explains some of the observation charts and gives ideas for alternatives to the observation instruments I had chosen.

All throughout the one-on-one interviews and the observation week, I reminded participants that it was essential that the teacher tell the observer what to do. To ensure that this was understood, I put this and other guidelines down in writing. The "Do's and Don'ts" format for both teacher and observer, as shown in Table 2, seemed to be the clearest way to do this.

TABLE 1

PEER OBSERVATION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my thesis project. Please read everything in this packet carefully. If you have any questions, please see me. Doing so will insure the success of this project and hopefully help you improve your teaching.

To help the teachers come up with a focus to give the observers, I've included different observation instruments. Please look at them and decide if these might help you investigate those aspects of your teaching you would like to know more about.

The seating chart can be used to record many different kinds of data. You can have the observer simply indicate which students you call on to determine if you are being fair to all your students. The observer can draw arrows indicating who is talking to whom, from teacher to students as a group, from teacher to individual students, from student to teacher, and from student to student. With a stopwatch, an observer can either record response time you give students to answer questions, or teacher talk time vs. student talk time.

If none of these instruments appears to be helpful, you can have the observer do an ethnography. Basically, this means that the observer would write everything that is said (by the teacher and the students) and everything that is done (by the teacher and the students). This requires a lot of writing (many pages in a notebook), and therefore should only be done for part of a class (from 20-30 minutes). A tape recorder can also be used to make sure that the transcript is complete and accurate.

Finally, you may also devise your own observation instrument. The goal is for the teacher to give the observer a focus which will help the teacher see things that might eventually lead to improved teaching.

Please don't hesitate to ask for help if you need any. The questionnaires should be returned to me as soon as possible. Try to be as thorough and honest as you possibly can. Thank you once more for your cooperation.

TABLE 2

DO'S AND DON'TS OF OBSERVATION

FOR THE TEACHER

DO tell your students (ahead of time if possible) that the observer is there to observe you and not them (this will put them at ease)

DO tell the observer exactly what you want to have observed.

DO let the observer know the nature of your class, the kind of materials being used, your approach to teaching, the kinds of students in your class, etc. (anything that will help the observer prepare before entering your class).

DO meet with the observer before and after the observation. The post-observation meeting should take place as soon as possible after the observation so you can more easily discuss the information that has been collected.

DO fill out the teacher's questionnaire as soon as possible and return it to me.

DO NOT involve the observer as a participant in your lesson. The observer cannot observe effectively if asked to do so.

DO NOT change your teaching style for the observation. The observer is not there to evaluate you, but to help you investigate problems you may have.

FOR THE OBSERVER

DO use the observation instruments agreed upon with the teacher.

DO meet with the teacher before and after the observation. The post-observation meeting should take place as soon as possible after the observation so you can more easily discuss the information that has been collected.

DO fill out the observer's questionnaire as soon as possible and return it to me.

DO NOT get involved in the lesson. You have a job to do.

DO NOT criticize or evaluate the teacher. Just stick to what the teacher has asked you to do.

The remainder of the information packet contained the five observation instruments (figures 1-5) and the questionnaires to be filled out afterwards (figures 6-7).

Once the observations started, there were very few questions asked. Most of the teachers were prompt in returning the questionnaires which I had asked them to fill out as soon as the observation and the post-observation interview were completed. Some of the pairs held their post-observation interview in the teachers' office, and I was able to overhear some of their comments. There seemed to be a general sense of accomplishment as well as relief that the extra task was over. Many of the pairs, upon learning that I wanted them to hand in the observation instruments they had used, made copies for their own files.

All in all, everything had gone smoothly except for the cancellation of certain classes. Most of these were the ones taught by the Japanese staff. They were canceled due to an upcoming school festival. A couple of observations by American teachers couldn't be done for the same reasons.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS OF THE PILOT STUDY

All of the teachers I had approached volunteered for this pilot study and participated by observing and being observed. Having set out in part to get teachers at HCFL to be aware of the need for and the usefulness of peer observation, my first objective was met by simply getting most of my colleagues involved. I believe they did so because they were curious and desired to participate in a project which might help them improve their teaching.

It was interesting to eavesdrop on the conversations of teachers in the office during the week peer observations were conducted. They were talking about observing successful teaching techniques, how students behaved differently in someone else's class, and in general, sharing useful ideas. This was in stark contrast with what was usually overheard prior to the observations—complaints and descriptions of negative teaching experiences. Thus, I achieved my second objective of making everybody aware that positive things were happening in the classrooms.

My third objective, which was to provide the teachers with support and encouragement, was accomplished because of two reasons. First of all, many of the pairs were friends with one another. Although they approached this pilot study seriously, they were relaxed and unafraid of someone else visiting their classroom. Such an observer was much more effective than a school

administrator, who would not be viewed as someone who could help, but rather someone who would evaluate and judge a teacher's performance.

Secondly, the teacher was in control by telling the observer what data to collect. These mostly objective results helped teachers confirm hypotheses they had about aspects of their own teaching. Knowing why things went well or didn't go well was helpful in that they could go on to the next step and make the necessary modifications. Although the observers were supposed to be "data-collectors," they could not resist the temptation to give praise where it was due as evidenced by the previously mentioned conversations overheard in the office. All of this contributed to the support and encouragement of the teachers.

The success of this pilot study has convinced me that peer observations can be conducted at schools with either experienced or inexperienced teachers, or a combination of the two. However, these observations will not take place automatically. There needs to be a teacher acting as a coordinator to get things started. As Richards and Lockhart pointed out, "...clear lines of communication about the nature and purpose of peer observation [are] essential from the very start. If it is viewed as simply another initiative from the administration, it may be resisted." (p. 9)

This pilot study has shown that peer observations are worth doing for at least six reasons:

1. Teachers gain valuable insights into aspects of their teaching. Indeed, the most exciting part for me was the change in attitude on the part of the teachers. Prior to this pilot study, most of my colleagues attributed unsuccessful classes to external factors such as the lack of motivation on the part of the students, the administration's policies, the weather, and so on. The

whole premise behind peer observations is that there are certain aspects of teaching which can be changed in order to help the teacher become more effective regardless of external factors. Some of these insights were general; "I feel I learned some important points concerning weaknesses and strengths in my class." Other insights were more specific; "I now know the cons of a big circle. [The] big circle was ineffective; [the] small group works well."

At times, observers would raise questions in addition to reporting results, "I learned that I was using poor wording at times. For example, I said: 'We use "ed" to show past tense.' Maybe I should use better wording." Had the teacher just tape recorded this portion of the lesson, chances are the ambiguity of the word "show" would not have been noticed. However, in this instance, the observer tried to help the teacher by questioning the clarity of this grammar explanation. This is especially helpful in situations where the students are less likely (due to a variety of reasons, such as cultural) to ask teachers to repeat or rephrase explanations they did not understand. Thus, observers can help by going beyond just recording data; their insights can give teachers important feedback.

2. Observers learn from their colleagues' teaching and from the different frame of reference in back of the class. Observers don't only help teachers, but also themselves. As one observer pointed out, "... when you are watching, you can get some good ideas." This is one way to share teaching techniques. Usually teachers attend conferences where they sometimes take the role of a student in a demonstration. Although it is valuable to experience a lesson from a student's point of view, it also helps to step away and observe the interaction between the teacher and student. Teachers can do just that while observing one of their own colleagues in action.

Most of the participants noted this mutually beneficial relationship as illustrated by this comment; "Yes, [I would do the peer observations again] because it helps [the teacher] and also it makes [the observers] think about what [they're] doing in [their] own class." This is something that I experienced in the supervision phase where I learned that the seating arrangement may affect the amount of attention students receive as the teacher circulates around the classroom while they are writing.

Usually, the observer will sit in the back of the classroom, seeing (or not seeing) and hearing (or not hearing) what students may or may not be able to see and hear. As an observer, when I couldn't read a teacher's handwriting on the blackboard, I wondered, "How's my writing?"; when I couldn't clearly hear what the teacher was saying, I wondered, "Can all of my students hear me?" This perspective lead me to take regular walks to the back of my classroom to see if students were able to copy what I had written on the board. As mentioned before, this is especially important when you have the kind of students who are unlikely to say, "I can't read your writing", or "Please speak louder!" The observer, therefore, can benefit from peer observations by acquiring useful teaching techniques from their colleagues and by seeing things from the students' vantage point.

3. Teachers work together to help one another as opposed to working in isolation from one another. In some schools, teachers are ignorant of what goes on in their colleagues' classrooms. Everybody has their own teaching style and it's thought best not to interfere with someone else's problems. In fact, some teachers would go as far as thinking of themselves as adversaries, competing to be more popular in the eyes of their students.

The peer observation brought about a change in attitude on the part of many. A team spirit was developed, where teachers helped one another strive towards a common goal—improvement in teaching to enhance students' learning. One teacher noted, "[The peer observations were] very useful, because if you have a problem, the [observer] can help you clear it up." This emphasizes what was stated earlier—the purpose of peer observations is for teachers to help one another and not a situation where teachers are judged.

4. Teachers are more involved in preparing for classes. Even though the participants in this pilot study understood the reasons for these observations were not to evaluate, many of them still wanted to perform well in front of their colleagues: "...I spent more time than usual thinking about this class. Treating every class as an 'observed' class would/could improve my perspective—especially with classes I dread teaching." This inexperienced teacher may have discovered the relationship between preparation and the effectiveness of a lesson. Once again, there are certain aspects of teaching which can be changed (preparation, in this case) in order to help the teacher become more effective regardless of external factors.

The insight this teacher had, that every class (not just the observed ones) should be well prepared, relates back to the first reason. The thought process many of the participants underwent as a result of the peer observations allowed them to view teaching as a profession rather than just a job.

5. Students are more attentive in class. This was an unexpected benefit. One teacher remarked, "... a few students who are sometimes problem students performed much better with the observer sitting by them." It may well be that these students thought they were being evaluated. It's also conceivable

that the teacher gained more respect showing them a desire to improve and therefore help them learn better. Students can appreciate the extra efforts their teachers make, and they may have viewed letting a colleague observe a class as a particularly courageous act. In fact, the school administration and the students' parents may look favorably on peer observations as well—seeing teachers donate their own time to improve themselves and eventually the quality of education offered at that school.

6. Results from peer observations help teachers decide how to improve their teaching effectiveness. Some of the teachers' comments reveal that they learned something (about aspects of their teaching) and that they had a solution in mind, "I'm not including every student equally—something I can remedy easily." This is significant in that this teacher recognized that every student should be included equally. It may very well be that these results helped this teacher formulate a belief about teaching not previously held. Inexperienced teachers, therefore, could discover what their philosophy towards teaching is, and experienced ones can verify what's happening in their classes instead of just making assumptions.

It's assumed that the teachers will do something with the information that was collected by the observer. This information can lead to the first phase of action-research:

Phase I	Develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening.
Phase II	Act to implement the plan.
Phase III	Observe the effects of action in the context in which they occur.
Phase IV	Reflect on these effects. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988)

Peer observation, then, is just one phase of a cyclical investigation into one's own teaching. In phase one, a teacher decides how to improve upon one of their teaching aspects by analyzing the results of a peer observation or (if the class wasn't observed) by engaging in reflective writing.

In phase two, the implementation of the plan usually means to modify the classroom behavior one was not satisfied with in the previous class. Before doing so, the teacher would inform the observer of the plan and together decide on an observation schedule that would best measure the teaching aspect being focused upon.

Phase three is the peer observation itself.

And phase four is back to reflecting on the results. This can be done individually by the teacher or in collaboration with the observer. The cycle is repeated until the teacher is satisfied with the effectiveness of the new teaching behavior. Thus, one can see the importance of considering a peer observation project as an ongoing activity rather than a single undertaking.

Finally, I would like to list a few steps that might help those contemplating organizing peer observations at their own school:

1. Start by informally discussing the idea with a few of your colleagues. Bringing it suddenly up in a faculty meeting without preparing others may not be looked upon favorably. Remember that you are asking your co-workers to donate their free time. If given a choice, they will likely reject it immediately, without bothering to learn what's involved and what they may be able to get out of it. A formal setting may also lead your colleagues to believe that this is a mandatory function required by the school administration, thus bringing up all the negative connotations associated with such an initiative.

2. Involve those who are interested in the project by collecting their ideas. Perhaps they will have helpful suggestions such as which observation schedules could be used.

3. Don't wait too long, hoping to involve the entire staff. Those who don't volunteer initially, may decide to join in at a later time—especially after they hear the positive comments from the ones already involved in the project.

4. Start with just one pair if necessary. Should the circumstances at your school so dictate, go ahead with the one colleague who is interested and take turns observing one another. One option I had not considered, which might work for some, was proposed by another advocate of peer observations: "It doesn't have to be a teacher in the same school as you. If your observer has to travel to observe your class, be prepared to pay transportation expenses." (Gorsuch, 1991)

5. Give teachers time to research their own observation schedules and techniques. It's essential that the participants find or create those schedules that best match the teaching aspects they want to investigate.

6. Find out what the general attitude is towards peer observations. This can be done by following step 1—talking informally to the teachers prior to officially announcing the project. The feedback you get from your colleagues will help you decide which guidelines are more appropriate—those developed by Richards and Lockhart, the variations I included in this pilot study, or whatever steps you feel will best help your colleagues complete your project.

This last point is very important; the number of volunteers for my project may have been smaller had I not modified some of Richards and Lockhart's guidelines. I believe it is best to approach inexperienced teachers

individually to explain the theory behind peer observations. A group meeting would not be as effective, because more experienced teachers usually dominate such discussions. Also, due to the voluntary nature of such a project, many teachers probably would not attend the first meeting and miss a chance to find out what peer observations are all about.

Although my project involved mostly inexperienced teachers, I would like to offer some suggestions concerning experienced teachers. Despite the fact that the increasing literature on peer observations has convinced many that such an undertaking is an essential part of a continuing program of teacher development, some may feel that they don't need to make any changes in their teaching. It is, therefore, important to interview any group of experienced teachers to identify which attitude is dominant. Then, depending upon the outcome of such a study, to adjust the project design accordingly.

In the end, everyone is rewarded; the experienced teachers continue their professional development, the inexperienced teachers begin theirs, and the coordinator enjoys the satisfaction of having started a program that will benefit all.

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